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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT WEDNESDAY, December 20, 1933

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SUBJECT: "Wild Fare." Information from the Bureau of Biological Survey and the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

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Specialists at the Department of Agriculture in Washington have had an unusually large number of requests for information on cooking game this fall. They tell me that depression times always bring an increase in hunting. People have more time to hunt and they often need the game for food. Even during the past week inquiries about cooking wild birds, wild rabbits, squirrels and so on have come in by mail and by phone. Game laws differ in the various states, but by the middle of this month--or even earlier--the season has closed in most places for certain kinds of game. But some of the common, less scarce wild things, like rabbits and squirrels, can still appear legally on your dinner table during the holidays. If you are in any doubt about the season on certain game, write to the State Game Department at the capitol of your state.

Have you ever noticed that some housewives who cook any domestic fowl to perfection, who manage a chicken or a turkey or a duck or a goose with the greatest ease, throw up their hands in despair when their husbands come home proudly with a brace of teal or a dozen quail? These women have an idea that cooking a game bird is an entirely different and complicated process from cooking anything else. But it isn't. In general, you can use the same recipe for preparing wild fowl that you do for the poultry that you buy at the market or raise in your own backyard. And you plan much the same sort of menu to go with it.

For example, if you have a tender young wild fowl, you cook it by frying just as you cook a young chicken. Then, if you have an older bird, you use the principle of long slow cooking at moist heat. The finished product in either case should be tender and moist. No one cares for dried out, hard or tough flesh.

The experts say that wild birds have a better flavor and are more tender if you hang them a few days before cooking. Of course, you can only do this in cold weather when the flesh won't spoil during the hanging period. Fasten the bird's feet together and hang it up by them.

Now about plucking. Most of our domestic ducks are scalded or steamed to loosen their feathers before plucking. But this practice is taboo for wild fowl. Pluck your wild birds dry. That goes for ducks and all other game birds. Pick the birds as clean as possible. Remove any long pin feathers with the point of a paring knife or with very small tweezers or even a strawberry guller. Rub off the down from wild fowl. Singe the fine feathers of other game birds. Now remove the head and feet and draw the birds.

Tastes differ on the matter of stuffing wild ducks. Whether you use well-flavored stuffing or not depends on whether you want to feature the strong

gamey flavor or whether you want to disguise it. People who like this strong natural taste don't want to camouflage it by adding strong seasoning. Others like to use a stuffing containing onion, celery, sage, thyme, even a bit of garlic, or any other poultry herbs and seasonings. One good cook I know puts a sliced apple, an onion, and a stalk of celery or two inside the duck during the roasting. She removes these before she serves the duck. Another friend uses a highly seasoned bread stuffing in her wild duck. She lets the stuffed bird stand in the refrigerator overnight before roasting. In this way, the flavor from the stuffing penetrates the flesh. You can even taste the onion and the sage in the drumsticks. Wild rice makes a fine stuffing for wild duck. You can use seasonings with it or not as you please.

What about adding fat during cooking? That depends on the kind of bird you are roasting. Upland game birds often are nicest if you add fat--bacon, perhaps, or salt pork. Small birds like quail you can wrap in thin strips of bacon. Wild fowl like duck are usually rich enough in themselves and don't need additional fat.

Now about the time for cooking. Some people like wild ducks or other dark-skinned game birds rare. But most people nowadays prefer all wild birds well done. Thorough cooking is a health measure, for one thing; it kills any tiny parasites that happen to be on the flesh. The time and temperature of your oven is the same as for chicken or other domestic fowl. You start the roasting in a hot oven to sear the bird. Then, after half an hour of searing, you reduce the heat and finish the roasting in a moderate oven. In general, allow about half an hour in the oven for each pound of bird. However you cook the bird be sure the finished product is both moist and tender. For roasting an older or less tender bird use a covered roaster.

The very small birds like quail are finest if you just broil them under a direct flame and serve them on toast. Split the bird, brush it over with butter, season and broil it. Serve on buttered toast. Each bird makes one serving.

Many people nowadays, who are interested in preserving our wild life, have given up shooting wild duck. But there is one wild fowl which is still numerous enough in this country to need some control measures. This is the coot or the mud hen. In spite of the fact that this bird has been given many unpleasant names, it is delicious if properly cooked. Where wild ducks and geese are scarce, the common coot can take its place as an edible bird. You skin the coot. Cut off the legs and breast. Split the breast in two parts. Wash all parts. Roll each piece in flour and fry slowly in bacon grease in a covered pan for thirty minutes. Add a cup of water, steam a minute or two. Then remove the meat and make a gravy of the juice.

Rabbit is one of the game meats that you cook like fowl. Rabbit meat is much like chicken meat, so you can use rabbit in most of your favorite chicken recipes. You can fry tender young rabbit and make a stew or a fricassee or a casserole of the older, less tender meat.

Squirrel? Skin, clean and cook these small animals whole. Broil or fry tender young squirrel. Simmer the older animals for several hours. Be sure to remove all particles of fur from the flesh.

There now. That's the game story. Let's just run over the main points. First: Cook game much as you do other similar domestic meat. Use long slow cooking at moist heat for older or less tender game. Use quick-cooking methods for the young game. Remember not to scald wild fowl but to pluck it dry. If you like the gamey flavor, use little seasoning. If you want to disguise this strong flavor, use a highly-seasoned stuffing. Cook rabbit as you do chicken. All game when cooked should be tender and moist.

Tomorrow: "Safety on Christmas."